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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6162  
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RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMCSUU/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS TUNIS 000210

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EEB/TRA/AN (HUTCHENS/ROCHE), EEB/CBA, EEB/EPPD,  
AND NEA/MAG (PATTERSON/HAYES)  
STATE PASS USTR (BURKHEAD)  
USDOC FOR ITA/MAC/ONE (MASON), ADVOCACY CTR (TABINE)  
CASABLANCA FOR FCS (ORTIZ)  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER  
PARIS PLEASE PASS TO FAA REP

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF TRANSPORTATION BRINGS UP OPEN SKIES

REF: A. 08 TUNIS 386  
[1](#)B. 08 TUNIS 344

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) During an Embassy reception, a senior Tunisian official from the Ministry of Transportation told the Ambassador the GOT is very interested in having an Open Skies Agreement with the United States and wants to proceed quickly through concrete actions. He suggested bilateral meetings between civil aviation authorities and said the GOT wanted a US airline with which they could negotiate a direct Tunisia-US flight. He noted Tunisair would not be poised to service a direct route until 2016. Post notes the GOT seems more interested in a direct flight than an actual Open Skies Agreement. End Summary.

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Signal for Open Skies  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) On March 31, Mr. Kamel Ben Miled, Director General for International Cooperation at the Tunisian Ministry of Transportation (MOT), told the Ambassador and EconOffs at a reception that the GOT is very interested in having an Open Skies Agreement with the United States and wants to proceed quickly and effectively through concrete actions. Emboffs reminded him that we had sent a diplomatic note proposing draft text, only to receive an ambiguous Tunisian response. Ben Miled said he recommended a meeting between experts from both countries' civil aviation authorities to prepare the ground for an agreement. The Ambassador offered to facilitate an experts' meeting and send the MOT another draft of the Open Skies Agreement. The Ambassador also offered to meet with the Minister of Transportation or other Ministry officials if it would be helpful.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Ben Miled said the GOT is interested in finding a US airline with which they can negotiate the possibility of flights between Tunisia and the United States, whether directly or via Europe. He noted approximately 20,000 Americans visit Tunisia each year, which is more than sufficient to make a two-hour flight between some European hubs and Tunis profitable. We reminded him about the pending request submitted by Northwest Airlines to code-share with

Air France and Tunisair, but Ben Miled said the Tunis-Paris route represents 20 percent of Tunisair's turnover and is its most profitable route. Thus, the acceptance of the request would be against Tunisair's interests. He said a code share via another European city, such as London, Frankfurt, or Rome, would be more viable. (Note: The Northwest request may become moot given their absorption by Delta, which already has a code share with Air France on the Paris-Tunis route.)

¶4. (SBU) Tunisair's capabilities, according to Ben Miled, would not allow it to offer a direct flight to the United States until at least 2016, when it is set to acquire its first long courier aircraft from Airbus.

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Comment  
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¶5. (SBU) We take the attendance of this relatively high-ranking transportation official at a reception for the changeover of mid-level officers as a signal of GOT eagerness to get this issue on the table. However, it is apparent the GOT is really interested in a direct flight, rather than negotiating an actual Open Skies agreement. Even so, this represents an opening if Washington wishes to pursue the matter. When Post re-transmits the draft model Open Skies text to the GOT, it could offer to arrange a meeting between relevant USG and GOT officials. With overall unemployment mounting and the tourism sector poised to take a direct hit due to the economic crisis, the GOT is doing everything in its power - including working on more US tourism to Tunisia - to ameliorate the situation. End Comment.  
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